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PAGE 01 STATE 017167

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TO ALL EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 017167

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, VS

SUBJECT: VIETNAM: THE CEASEFIRE -- ONE YEAR LATER

ONE YEAR AGO TODAY, THE PARIS AGREEMENT ON ENDING THE WAR
AND RESTORING THE PEACE IN VIETNAM WENT INTO EFFECT.
FOLLOWING IS THE ABSTRACT OF AN INR RESEARCH STUDY
WHICH EXAMINES THE MAIN DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS DURING THAT
YEAR.

1. THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING HAS DECLINED IN THE PAST YEAR BUT
PEACE HAS NOT BEEN RESTORED. BOTH SIDES HAVE VIOLATED THE
AGREEMENT AND MILITARY ACTIVITY HAS PERSISTED, ALTHOUGH
GENERALLY AT A LOW LEVEL.

2. MOST VIETNAMESE EXPECT TO SEE THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING
INCREASE AT SOME POINT, AND BOTH SIDES HAVE USED THE PAST
YEAR TO STRENGTHEN THEIR FORCES. THE COMMUNIST FORCE IS
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PAGE 02 STATE 017167

NOW SLIGHTLY LARGER THAN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1972
OFFENSIVE AND HAS IMPRESSIVE AMOUNTS OF ARMOR, LONG RANGE

ARTILLERY, AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONRY. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE ALSO SIGNIFICANTLY EXPANDED AND IMPROVED THEIR LOGISTIC SYSTEM.

3. SAIGON HAS ALSO USED THE PERIOD SINCE THE CEASEFIRE TO STRENGTHEN ITS FORCES. WHILE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE MEN UNDER ARMS HAS NOT INCREASED, SAIGON'S MANEUVER BATTALIONS ARE NOW MORE NUMEROUS AND EFFECTIVE.

4. FEW VIETNAMESE EXPECT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF CONTROL AND SUPERVISION TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE, IF AND WHEN EVENTS TAKE A TURN FOR THE WORSE. NOR IS THERE MUCH HOPE THAT THE PARIS TALKS WILL PRODUCE A POLITICAL SOLUTION. THEY REMAIN DEADLOCKED AND NEITHER SIDE HAS BEEN WILLING TO COMPROMISE ON BASIC ISSUES.

5. AT THE BEGINNING OF 1973, AN AMBITIOUS POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THE CEASEFIRE WAS OUTLINED IN COSVN DIRECTIVE 002. COMMUNIST CADRE WERE TO ENGAGE IN AN EXTENSIVE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN -- BACKED BY MILITARY HARASSMENT -- TO CONVINCE GVN SOLDIERS THAT THE WAR NEED NOT GO ON AND THAT THEY WOULD ONLY SUFFER FROM CONTINUED FIGHTING. RECRUITING NEW FOLLOWERS AND PENETRATING TARGET ORGANIZATIONS WERE MAJOR GOALS.

6. ALTHOUGH SAIGON COULD NOT PREVENT VC ACCESS TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE POPULATION, IT WAS ABLE TO LIMIT THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF VC AGENTS. HANOI HAS HAD LITTLE SUCCESS IN ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO "LIBERATED" AREAS AND CAN CLAIM EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF ONLY ABOUT 5 PERCENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM'S 20 MILLION PEOPLE. HANOI HAS RECEIVED INCREASINGLY DISCOURAGING REPORTS FROM KEY AREAS OF SOUTH VIETNAM POINTING TO THE POOR RESULTS OF ITS POST-CEASEFIRE POLITICAL STRATEGY. TOWARD THE END OF THE YEAR, HANOI APPEARED TO BE MODIFYING ITS STRATEGY SLIGHTLY CALLING FOR LIMITED MILITARY ACTION THAT WOULD PUT GVN TROOPS ON THE DEFENSIVE AND GRADUALLY EXPAND AREAS UNDER COMMUNIST CONTROL.

7. ON THE GVN SIDE, PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU'S PERSONAL
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PAGE 03 STATE 017167

POSITION WAS FURTHER STRENGTHENED AND POLITICAL POWER WAS EVEN MORE CONCENTRATED IN THE PALACE. THIEU'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL BASE IN THE MILITARY, POLICE, AND BUREAUCRACY REMAINED SOLID, AND UNITED STATES SUPPORT FOR HIM WAS REAFFIRMED. POPULAR FRUSTRATION WITH THE CONTINUED FIGHTING DID NOT TRANSLATE INTO POLITICAL PRESSURE AGAINST THIEU'S JUDGMENT THAT NO MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS WERE POSSIBLE. NOR DID GROWING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CAUSE VISIBLE EROSION IN HIS POLITICAL BASE. THERE WAS NO MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE HEALTHY POLITICAL PARTY

SYSTEM THAT THIEU HAS PUBLICLY CLAIMED IS NECESSARY FOR SOUTH VIETNAM'S SURVIVAL, AND HIS DEMOCRACY PARTY REMAINS THE ONLY LEGALLY RECOGNIZED PARTY. FACED WITH WEAK AND DIVIDED OPPOSITION GROUPS, THIEU AND HIS SUPPORTERS AMENDED THE CONSTITUTION, ALLOWING THE PRESIDENT TO SEEK A THIRD TERM IN OFFICE.

8. SOUTH VIETNAM'S MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS WERE ECONOMIC. THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCED THE HIGHEST RATE OF INFLATION

SINCE THE 1965-66 PERIOD WITH THE USAID SAIGON INDEX OF RETAIL PRICES UP 67 PERCENT DURING THE YEAR. HOPES FOR INCREASED PRIVATE INVESTMENT FOLLOWING THE CEASEFIRE WERE NOT REALIZED AS POTENTIAL INVESTORS REMAINED WARY OF THE CONTINUED FIGHTING. SAIGON'S IMPORT-BASED ECONOMY REMAINED HIGHLY DEPENDENT ON FOREIGN AID, WHICH, HOWEVER, DID NOT INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY DURING THE YEAR. ALTHOUGH SOME ASSISTANCE FROM FRANCE AND JAPAN IS IN SIGHT, THE UNITED STATES WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MAIN SOURCE OF FOREIGN AID. A REDUCTION OF US AID AT THIS POINT WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH IN TURN COULD GENERATE POLITICAL UNREST.

9. ALTHOUGH GVN FORCES GRADUALLY AND ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY ERODED COMMUNIST TERRITORIAL AND POPULATION CONTROL, 1973 SAW NO MAJOR CHANGES IN THIS REGARD. SAIGON SUFFERED OCCASIONAL MILITARY SETBACKS WHEN REGULAR NVA UNITS ENGAGED ITS FORCES AND WAS GENERALLY UNABLE TO PUSH THE NVA BACK FROM ITS MORE IMPORTANT BASE COMPLEXES ALONG THE WESTERN BORDER. THE COMMUNISTS' OWN MILITARY PROBES DURING THE YEAR GAVE THEM NO REASON FOR GREAT CONFIDENCE.
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PAGE 04 STATE 017167

THE YEAR CLEARLY ESTABLISHED SAIGON'S ABILITY TO COPE WITH LOW LEVEL COMMUNIST ENCROACHMENTS AND ARVN IS STILL INTACT AND SOMEWHAT STRONGER. NEVERTHELESS, THE COMMUNISTS STEADILY IMPROVED THEIR CAPABILITIES TO LAUNCH AND SUSTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF CONVENTIONAL WARFARE. KISSINGER

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